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**THE
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By Gaston Richard

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by Gustav Blücher

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The Trial

of the

COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

IN FRANCE

BY GASTON RICHARD

NEW YORK

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I. THE BACKGROUND OF FRANCE'S DEFEAT

ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1939, when the French Government declared war on Germany, the whole bourgeois press of France, with a furious crescendo of invective against the U.S.S.R., immediately began to discuss with one voice the question of how to fight the war to a finish without social upheavals. When they declared war the bourgeoisie immediately made it their concern to save Europe (not only France but all Europe!) from the indignation (and revolutionary actions) of the masses, to save civilization (*i.e.*, the capitalist system) from the wrath of the proletariat.

After declaring war on Germany and mobilizing five million soldiers, the bourgeoisie and the rulers of France for eight months launched no military operations against Germany. But they waged relentless war inside the country against the working class, against the masses of the people and the Communist Party. The main concern of the French bourgeoisie and their henchmen, the so-called Socialists, was to preserve their class rule and their class interests, their capital, their profits and their colonies.

A month after the outbreak of war, following the collapse of the Polish state, that ramshackle prison of nations, France received offers of peace. On October 1, 1939, the parliamentary group of the Communist Party of France addressed a letter to the president of the Chamber of Deputies demanding that the Chamber be summoned immediately to discuss the question of peace and that a drastic check be put on tendencies to reject the peace proposals as likely to precipitate France into a reckless adventure and catastrophe. The letter went on to say that the war, if continued, would "bury the treasures of human culture beneath mountains of ruins and cost the lives of millions of men, women and children," that it would "jeopardize both its future and its democratic liberties."

At that time the conditions for the conclusion of peace were exceptionally favorable in general and for France in particular. However, the bourgeoisie and their government, on receipt of

this letter from the Communist parliamentary group, a letter which voiced the social and national interests of the French nation, retorted in true gendarme style. They put the Communist deputies behind bars. Instead of discussing peace the Government and the press, ever obedient to the sinister financial oligarchy of the 200 Families, declared five million French citizens traitors to France, among them a million soldiers.

And the war continued, a waiting game as far as Germany was concerned, but fast and furious against the French people. Aircraft, artillery, shells, money and officers were sent to Finland for war against the U.S.S.R. In Syria armies and air bases were organized for aggression on the U.S.S.R. The persecution of Communists was intensified. On April 4, 1940, the provost court of the Paris Command sentenced the Communist deputies to long terms of imprisonment. They were sentenced as the indictment had it, for "drafting and circulating a letter dated October 1 and dispatched to *Monsieur the President of the Chamber* in which they advocated the restoration of peace with the cooperation of the Soviet Union."

BOURGEOISIE BETRAY NATIONAL INTERESTS

The bourgeoisie, their ministers and even the High Command of the French army were so busy for over eight months fighting against the French people, so blinded by their bestial hatred of the U.S.S.R., so absorbed in their perfidious plans to create vantage grounds and military bases for adventures against the U.S.S.R., that when the German armies launched their offensive in May France was caught unprepared. The French army met the German offensive not with serious and well-planned military operations but with slap-dash improvisations that failed before they were properly begun. The bourgeois press openly admitted that the French army was taken by surprise on all fronts, that the battle of Dunkirk concluded one series of military catastrophes and opened another.

On June 14 Paris fell without offering any resistance. And on June 25 only a month and a half after the opening of active hostilities, the French army, suffering defeat after defeat, and retreating all along the line, was obliged to surrender in compliance with the orders of the Government and the High Com-

mand. On June 25 the French Government accepted the terms of Germany and Italy and, with their own hand, erased France from the list of great European powers. Thus, France, an independent state for one thousand five hundred years, with a population of over forty million, with an army of six million, with a powerful navy, tremendous resources and superb technical equipment, this great European country let herself be beaten in the space of some five weeks! The French army with its well-trained men, noted for courage and soldierly stamina, could not resist for even a month! The people of Spain with no military experience, with no trained officers to command them could withstand for nearly three years an enemy many times stronger, better equipped and better trained. The totally unarmed people of Ethiopia could resist for a long period the motorized legions of Italy. But France gave in! Madrid defended herself and fought for a thousand days and fell only as a result of treachery. And Paris, a city of nearly six million, the heart and soul of the French proletariat, as a result of the treacherous policy of the bourgeoisie, did not defend herself a single day! The war resulted in the debacle of France. Large areas were devastated, mutilated, laid waste. Vast numbers of Frenchmen were killed, wounded and taken prisoner. Ten million people have been converted into homeless vagrants. Unemployment and hardship are widespread as never before. The whole country is convulsed, stunned, overwhelmed with grief and indignation.

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT

How could such a catastrophe have overtaken such a country so swiftly? What were the main causes of France's defeat? Who was responsible for such a debacle? What classes, parties and personages are responsible for France's calamities? It is not difficult to answer these questions. All these events were foreseen. The Communist Party of France tirelessly warned the people that the bourgeois rulers of France were pushing them into an abyss. They exerted all their forces to preserve the country and the people from the fate which the bourgeoisie were preparing for them.

The aim constantly uppermost in the foreign policy of the French Government was not to defend the interests of the

French nation and the security of France, but to maintain the Versailles system, to preserve and consolidate the colonial empire, to organize blocs and alliances of vassal states for war on the Soviet Union. The whole policy of both sections of the bourgeoisie, pro-British and pro-German alike, was cunningly shaped, though with formal differences, to the one end: turn Germany eastward, draw her into an anti-Soviet coalition and set her at war with the U.S.S.R. The anti-Soviet sentiments of the French imperialists and the Socialists became stronger every year, while among the people of France sympathy for the Soviet Union grew stronger and deeper. For months after the declaration of war on Germany, the bourgeoisie and the rulers of France proclaimed in all keys that France's main enemy was the U.S.S.R. They used all the terroristic methods at their command (without success) to make the Communists and the working class of France condemn the policy of the Soviet Union.

The campaign against the Soviet Union continued right up to the culmination of France's defeat. On June 1, *Epoch* made the following comment on certain French bourgeois circles:

"Even at the present moment when a hurricane is sweeping our unhappy country, scattering devastation and death, even at this moment when our cities are being razed by fire and our property plundered they still consider Bolshevism menace No. 1."

The foreign policy of the French capitalists with respect to the U.S.S.R., Germany, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Italy, Poland and Turkey was not centered on the security of France, nor the preservation of peace, but pursued reactionary imperialist aims and, above all, counter-revolutionary plans against the U.S.S.R. This ruinous foreign policy, which the French rulers adopted with their eyes open, logically continued and reflected in the strategic plans and the practical methods of conducting the war, could only be conducive to the military and political downfall of the Third Republic of bourgeois France.

The fate of France was sealed long before the outbreak of war, chiefly and particularly by the entire home policy of the bourgeoisie and their Government, the policy and activities of

the bourgeois parties, among which the Socialist Party played anything but a minor part.

Long before the outbreak of the present European war and while they were preparing for it feverishly, the bourgeoisie opened hostilities against the working class, against the peasantry, the Communists, against popular rights and liberties. The financial oligarchy began their offensive in a number of directions simultaneously. First, against the People's Front.

THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE PEOPLE

The People's Front in France took shape between 1934 and 1936 as a result of the activity of the proletariat and the working people of town and country. It was a broad alliance of the masses under the leadership of the proletariat after it had achieved trade union unity. The main object of the People's Front was to oppose big business, the camp of reaction and war, to fight for the betterment of the conditions of the people, to extend and consolidate democratic rights and preserve peace.

The People's Front was a broad mass movement which brought the people great benefits. It became a great political force, which, by further growth, would have isolated the big bourgeoisie, curtailed their profits and privileges and frustrated their reactionary schemes of imperialist war. To try to halt and smash this movement by a frontal attack became too risky for the bourgeoisie. They retreated.

However, while they made forced concessions they were maneuvering, regrouping their forces, mobilizing vast resources, striving to disrupt the People's Front from within. Employing the services of their agents in the labor movement, such as Blum and Jouhaux, using the government of Blum, Chautemps and Daladier, the big capitalists were able to disrupt the People's Front, prevent its program from being carried out and balk the reforms already passed. The parliamentary majority which was elected in 1936 on the People's Front program, succumbing to bribery and terrified by the growth of the mass movement, betrayed the People's Front, betrayed their electors and formed a political alliance with the reactionary deputies. With these partners they made capital out of the war threat and gave the

Government unlimited powers to rule the country at its own discretion, *i.e.*, the discretion of the financial oligarchy.

The Communist Party alone remained loyal to the program of the People's Front and the interests of the people. On the eve of the war the leaders of all the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties with their various cliques and caucuses formed a "holy alliance" against the people and the Communists. Jouhaux and the leaders of the Socialist Party were in the front ranks of this "holy alliance." By breaking down the People's Front the bourgeoisie weakened the French nation, paralyzed it economically and politically, deprived it of every opportunity to influence the policy of France, gave free rein to the economic and coercive impulses of the reactionaries, surrendered the army into the hands of the reactionary officers, opened the door to the instigators of war, accelerated the outbreak of war and paved the way to defeat.

Secondly, it was an offensive against the working class. After receiving unlimited powers Daladier's government, in August, 1938, opened hostilities against the working class with a series of emergency decrees. Referring to the danger of war, it began to regulate working conditions, wage rates, hours of work and relations between the workers and employers. Led by the Communist Party the working class put up a stubborn resistance, disputing every inch of the ground and fighting for the repeal of the emergency decrees.

On November 30, 1938, the working class declared a general strike in protest against the emergency decrees and the foreign policy of the French Government. The strike was perfidiously betrayed by the Jouhaux clique in collusion with Blum, Daladier and the employers. A million and a half workers were locked out; among them were over 600,000 skilled metal workers engaged in aircraft production and other branches of the war industry. The employers were given a free hand to continue the offensive against the working class. Thus, on the eve of the war, stress continually being laid on the defense of the realm, the working class was deprived of its main gains.

When war was declared, the offensive against the working class was carried on much quicker, more brutally, with open force and the imposition of war-time law. The working day was

lengthened to 12 hours, a 15 per cent levy was introduced on wages, and a 40 per cent levy on overtime (over 43 hours); the weekly day of rest was abolished; the collective agreements were annulled; all men, women and juveniles engaged in industry were militarized; compulsory labor was introduced on the land; a baton and bayonet regime was set up in industrial enterprises, those guilty of the slightest offense being sent to jail, concentration camps or conscripted into disciplinary battalions. Real wages dropped steadily, prices rose. Prime necessities became inaccessible to the people. The bourgeoisie made haste to shift the financial burden of the war onto the shoulders of the working people, an enormous sum which, according to the estimates of December, 1939, was to reach 420,000,000,000 francs in 1940 alone.

The position of the peasantry radically deteriorated. The war office requisitioned their farm produce and draught animals. Eighty per cent of the able-bodied rural population was conscripted.

The position of the urban petty-bourgeoisie, civil servants and intelligentsia was also seriously affected.

Great hardships were suffered by the hundreds of thousands of people evacuated from Alsace Lorraine, the north and north-eastern departments, Paris and other cities and scattered over the countryside of central and southern France.

Discontent and resentment became more and more widespread among the working class, the peasantry, a certain section of the urban petty bourgeoisie, the lower paid officials and even the middle strata.

The workers could not reconcile themselves to the loss of their hard-won gains. They fought against the longer hours, the fraudulent deductions, the "stabilization" of wages which remained at the level of the previous summer although the cost of living was constantly rising. The workers were incensed by the tyranny of the employers of the police in the factories.

There was a growing indignation among the workers and city people generally against the tenement owners who raised rents, although during the war of 1914-1918 a moratorium had been declared on rent.

Discontent grew in the countryside. A large percentage of the persons arrested and sentenced by the military tribunals for

tendentious information, for "anti-national feeling," for "inciting the soldiers to insubordination" for "endangering the security of the state," etc., were peasants, peasant women and farm laborers.

The longer the war dragged on the harder it hit the people, the greater their discontent. The increasing discontent of the masses alarmed the bourgeoisie. They felt and understood the potentialities of a people of whom Lenin wrote in his day:

"The French masses are perhaps among the foremost in experience, political enlightenment, virility and responsiveness." *

In tightening drastically the exploitation of the working people, filching their social and economic gains, committing monstrous robberies of the masses by taxation, the bourgeoisie had only one policy in view, a policy of more profits. It mattered little to them that this policy was undermining the moral and material powers of the nation, weakening the country's defenses, demoralizing the army and the people in the rear, and inviting defeat.

THE WAR HYSTERIA

After the declaration of war the ruling powers and the whole French press declared and tirelessly reiterated that this was a war for freedom and democracy. And, by way of proof, the last vestiges of democratic rights and liberties in France were destroyed. In place of democratic freedom—repressions against the people. No right remained but the right of the bourgeoisie to wreak class vengeance on the working people. Freedom of the press was superseded by the suppression of the labor press and the confiscation of its funds. The trade unions were destroyed, their wreckage placed under the tutelage of the police. Reprisals followed every sign of discontent, every word of criticism, the slightest disapproval of orders issued by the authorities or employers, every act of opposition. Thus, a couple of hours' absence from the factory was punished with imprisonment; likewise protests against longer hours. Persons who criticized the actions of the factory management were sent to concentration camps.

* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXIV, p. 28, Russian Ed.

Repressions became such an everyday thing that even the "Socialists," the betrayers of the working class, were forced to say something about them. For instance, Jouhaux' newspaper *Peuple* on April 11, 1940, reported: "*Very often factory directors threaten to send the 'specially attached' employees to the front or hand over trade union officials to the military authorities as suspicious characters merely because they have raised the question of working conditions with the employers.*"

Criticism of the government, expressions of discontent against the war, words of sympathy for the Communists, indignation at the high cost of living were all cases for court martial and imprisonment. The military tribunal in Boulogne-sur-Mer passed sentence of imprisonment on Marie Jule Pucet, a woman 57 years of age, a teacher of history and geography in a girls' high school for "speaking enthusiastically of the Soviet Union during a lesson." Tirion, a working man, was sentenced by a military tribunal in Paris to six years' imprisonment "for words which might have an adverse influence on the morale of the army and the population." August David, a peasant seventy-one years of age, was put in prison for "tendentious information." Maurice Chaumain was sentenced to two years' imprisonment because he absented himself from his work for a few hours. There were thousands of analogous cases.

Farm laborers were arrested for "anti-national interpretations of the international situation." The police prefects were given powers to expel under escort or intern in concentration camps all persons "who do not inspire confidence or are suspected of harboring dangerous thoughts."

Compulsory residence was introduced for all working people. Travel from one town to another was hedged about with so many police formalities that it was virtually prohibited. Microphones were installed in cafes, hotels, theaters and cinemas. A special army of informers and eavesdroppers were formed to pry into private apartments, to smell out "the organizers of discontent with the war," "the propagators of communism," "persons dissatisfied with the cost of living" and other "socially dangerous" elements who dared to call Blum and Jouhaux traitors and bourgeois lackeys.

Under the decree of January, 1939, persons were arrested for

speeches, conversations, articles, remarks, written statements, printed matter, posters, leaflets, etc., which directly or indirectly might have a derogatory effect on the morale of the nation or the army, police prefects and gendarmes being given the right to decide what word, tone, or statement may have such an influence.

To combat "defeatism" the French Government issued a decree according to which any conversation might "subjectively or objectively be criminal in character." According to this decree—which is a model of police chicanery and stupidity—objective criminality consisted in a word or conversation which may have a derogatory influence on public sentiment. Subjective criminality consisted in words or conversations which were quite innocuous in themselves but emanated from persons suspected of a dangerous thought. Conversations were actionable but even silence fell under the suspicion of the bourgeoisie. A special gang of declassed elements was formed to spy on French public opinion, guard it against critical opinions, ferret out Communists and terrorize their families.

Even more inhuman was the treatment of refugees from Spain, Italy and other countries. They were given an ultimatum: either join the army or go to jail, be put in concentration camps or be delivered into the hands of Franco and other butchers. Over ten thousand Spanish republicans were sent on forced labor schemes building fortifications. Over twenty thousand were interned in military concentration camps, over one hundred thousand were put on compulsory labor on the land and in the factories.

In his declaration of November 10, 1939, printed in the illegal press of the Communist Party of France, Florimond Bonte said:

"One hundred and fifty years after the French Revolution, France, the land of freedom, has become a land of concentration camps. In France there are concentration camps for the Spaniards who had to flee their country when the republic fell under the blows of the foreign invaders who were helped by the policy of 'non-intervention' pursued by the governments of Paris and London. In France there have been concentration camps for foreigners but never for Frenchmen. Now this gap has been filled. The government has resurrected the *lettre de cachet* and arrogated the right to sentence perfectly innocent people to internment in concentra-

tion camps and to penal servitude. Violating the principles of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,' according to which no citizen may be prosecuted unless there is proof that he has committed a misdemeanor or felony, the government has arrogated the right to deprive any citizen of his liberty at any moment without his having the right to appeal.

"This is nothing but a foul policy of reaction which shows clearly that our liberties are being menaced from within, that *the enemies of the French people are to be found in France herself*. Never before has France gone so far on the path of reaction. Never before have the principles of the freedom of the individual been so trampled upon. Never in this country has there been such a ruthless destruction of the political, trade union, juridical and other liberties which have been enjoyed by French citizens."

By destroying popular rights and liberties, suppressing labor organizations and the labor press, by introducing a regime of reaction and police tyranny, a system of repressions and White terror against the masses of the people, the French bourgeoisie hoped to intimidate the people and make them play the part of dumb beasts of burden and of cannon fodder.

This regime of reaction made France a happy hunting-ground for the Fifth Column to function openly and with impunity. Under this regime corruption, mediocrity, stupidity, venality and treachery could occupy responsible posts in the state machine, in the army, in the supply and transport system, in all the vital nerve centers of the country.

TERROR AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS

It is quite obvious that by creating such an intolerable situation in France, treating her people as the most dangerous enemy, heaping indignities upon them and sheltering the real enemies of the country, the bourgeoisie of France did more to bring about France's defeat than all the thousands of tanks hurled against her by the enemy.

The spearhead of the internal offensive was aimed against the Communist Party of France. In this offensive the bourgeoisie, as

though sensing their doom, concentrated all their class hatred, all their perfidy, all the cruelty of a terrified beast of prey in danger of losing the quarry.

In the last ten years the Communist Party has become the largest mass political party in France with a membership of over 300,000, erecting its political and ideological influence on millions of proletarians and working people generally. In the eyes of the proletariat and the masses of the people the Communist Party remained and still remains the only party true to the program of the People's Front, the only party upholding the interests of the people, the only champion of the people's rights and liberties against the onslaught of the capitalists and the rest of the reactionary camp, the only thoroughgoing and consistent fighter for peace, the only true defender of the national independence of the French people. The attempts of the bourgeoisie to isolate the Communist Party from the masses failed miserably. That is why when the war began the bourgeoisie resorted immediately to their last and long-prepared "weighty" argument: terror and violence.

A few days before the outbreak of the present imperialist war the French bourgeoisie suppressed that revolutionary voice of the French and international proletariat, *l'Humanité*. It then immediately opened fire on the rest of the Communist Press.

Having destroyed the Communist press the bourgeoisie outlawed the Communist Party, seized all its premises, confiscated its property, and dissolved about eight hundred important trade union organizations under Communist influence. They dissolved and outlawed hundreds of non-party cultural, educational and sports organizations of workers, peasants, women and youth which were under the ideological influence of the Party.

In its decree of September 26, 1939, suppressing the Communist Party, the Government declared that all activities with the object of propagating directly or indirectly the slogans of the Third, Communist, International would be punished with imprisonment up to five years.

The reactionary terrorist party of Ybarnegary and de la Rocque celebrated. "Bravo!" they cried, "at last our demands have been satisfied." The "Socialist" procurer Leon Blum seconded them with tears of emotion in his eyes. He wrote:

"I believe that the majority of the Socialist Party will find the dissolution of the Communist Party natural and legitimate and will approve all measures applied against it including the infliction of the death penalty on its leaders."

Hundreds and thousands of active Communists, factory workers, trade unionists and propagandists were thrown into prison, run the gauntlet of military tribunals, sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or penal servitude. Hundreds of young Communists, heroically enduring the tortures and indignities to which they were subjected in the guard rooms of the police stations, faced the military tribunals, staunchly defending their ideals, their Party, their class.

Whole families were imprisoned and court-martialed: fathers, mothers, and sons and daughters in their 'teens. They were put on trial and sentenced merely because a son or daughter had been "engaging in Communist propaganda," while their children as juvenile offenders were sent to "reformatories."

The Communist Party still had one legal avenue open—to speak to the people of France through parliament and the municipal councils. The bourgeoisie, hand in glove with the "Socialists," dissolved the Communist municipal councils, arrested and committed for court martial a large number of municipal councillors and the Communist deputies who had together received over one and a half million votes and represented about five million French citizens.

On March 19, 1940, Albert Sarraut, then Minister of the Interior, submitted to the Senate a police report on the repressive measures which had been applied against the Communist Party:

"... The Communists have no more seats. Three hundred Communist municipal councils have been dissolved. Altogether 2,778 Communist deputies and members of municipal, department and district councils have been deprived of their mandates. In 443 cases measures have been taken against civil servants who belong to the Communist Party.

"The Communist *l'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, which had a circulation of 500,000 and 250,000 respectively, like 159 other papers of less importance, have been proscribed. The print-

ing plants have been closed. Communism has neither a forum nor a newspaper.

"Furthermore, six hundred and twenty-nine trade union organizations have been dissolved. Measures have been taken to prevent the restoration of their trade unions.

"Eleven thousand searches have been made in premises which might serve as Communist meeting places; 675 Communist branches have been dissolved. In addition, active Communists are being rounded up. Up to March 7, 3,400 persons have been arrested. The prosecution of Communists is continuing. As for their accomplices and the foreigners, a large number have been interned in concentration camps or deported. Altogether individual punitive measures have been taken against Communists in 8,000 cases. . . ."

THE COMMUNISTS MAINTAIN TIES WITH THE MASSES

The reaction was triumphant. But in spite of all the persecutions and repressions Communism was far from being eradicated. Even the reactionary press was forced to admit the futility of all that had been done to explain, expose and repress the "criminal" and "dangerous" activities of the Communists, that popular sympathy for the Communists was unshaken and that it was deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Why is it that terror and repressions could not weaken the influence of the Communist Party among the masses of the people? In what lies the strength of the Communists?

The strength of the Communist Party is inexhaustible, because it is the only party of the proletariat, because it has such strong ties with the masses, defends their vital interests, expresses their own thoughts and feelings, enjoys their boundless confidence, support and cooperation. This party alone is the consistent champion of the true interests of the French people, their liberty and independence.

At the end of December, 1939, when one of the reactionary front-benchers indignantly complained that Communist activities were on the increase in spite of the repressions, Sarraut gave him the following information:

"In parliament the Communist deputies represent a million and a half electors and if we count the Communist sup-

porters among the women and foreign workers, who do not take part in elections, the Communists represent over 4,000,000 of the adult population."

"You must understand what this means!" cried the irritated minister; then to allay all doubts, he added:

"In the Paris district alone there are no less than 500,000 persons who voted Communist in 1936. In other places there are hundreds of thousands of citizens supporting the Communist movement. These hundreds of thousands of people have not disappeared and this means that there are several hundreds of thousands of homes serving as a refuge for persons who are wanted by the police. There are thousands of typewriters printing leaflets. The families of active Communists are also duplicating leaflets which are then distributed in the factories."

Yes, Monsieur Sarraut was right! The Communists of France, deep underground, enjoying the support and protection of hundreds of thousands of proletarian families, *did not stop working for a moment*, but displayed Bolshevik initiative and resource.

The Communist Party published its central organ, *l'Humanité*, illegally not only in printed form but in stencilled copies. If there were not enough printed copies to go around the local organizations made hand-written or typed copies. The Party published illegally two issues of its theoretical organ *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, which were distributed in many thousands of copies. The Party also published pamphlets, manifestoes and resolutions. They were published not only by the central and regional committees of the Party but also by the district and local committees. A number of district Party committees had their own publications. In the majority of the departments, in each of the twenty districts of Paris, the Party organizations issued leaflets. The Communist units in the large industrial enterprises published factory papers.

In spite of the repressions the workers obtained illegal Communist literature in all kinds of ways. In many cities a single copy of the illegal *l'Humanité* was read by an average of fifty workers. Many workers made photographed copies and spread them.

The workers made a habit of passing the paper on to their

friends after they had finished with it, telling them: "Read it and give it to others to read." Collections for *l'Humanité* were made inside the factories. There was an enormous interest in illegal Communist literature among the progressive democratic intellectuals and a particularly great demand for the theoretical journal of the Communist Party, *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*.

The illegal leaflets of the Communist Party exposed the predatory, imperialist character of the war, the true role and responsibility of the government, the industrialists, bankers, the reactionary deputies, the senators, the gangster journalists, the "Socialist" leaders and the rest. A large proportion of the Communist leaflets took up the immediate economic demands of the workers, the struggle against the high cost of living, against the profiteers and other rogues making capital out of the war.

Of special note were the leaflets on the U.S.S.R. in which the Communist Party of France systematically exposed to the public the lies and calumnies which the bourgeois press circulated about the Soviet Union. They reported the achievements of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., showing that the U.S.S.R. is the only state which is consistently and unswervingly pursuing a policy of peace and upholding the cause of peace.

These Party leaflets were always topical and to the point. If, for instance, in any locality the police arrested a Communist worker, perhaps not widely known, but esteemed in his own circle, his neighbors immediately issued a leaflet of protest.

Thus the Communist Party of France, outlawed and driven deep underground, continued heroically to uphold the cause of the proletariat and the people, denouncing the real enemies of the people and the real enemies of France, rallying the people, pointing out to France the only possible way out of the holocaust of war and salvation from catastrophe. The masses of the soldiers, too, listened to the voice of the Communist Party. The political prestige of the Communists grew steadily at the front and in the rear. But the repressions grew only the more vicious for this. It mattered little to the bourgeoisie that by striking against the Communists, the most advanced, organized, staunch, active and intelligent section of the French people, they were dealing the people and the army a treacherous stab in the back, a mortal blow to the heart of France herself.

II. THE ARREST OF THE COMMUNIST DEPUTIES AND THE "PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION"

The bestial and cowardly fury of the imperialist bourgeoisie and their faithful lackeys, the "Socialist" leaders, and their treacherous policy towards the people of France, were displayed conspicuously in the outrage on the parliamentary group of the Communist Party of France.

To give the reactionaries no formal grounds for provocative action, after the outlawing of the Communist Party the Communist deputies in the Chamber reconstituted themselves a "Workers' and Peasants' Group." Its formation was officially announced on September 29, 1939, in the Government's *Journal Officiel*. On October 5, a session was opened. After a two-day meeting the session was declared closed. On the same day the Government ordered the arrest and committal for court martial of the Communist deputies, members of the newly formed "Workers' and Peasants' Group."

The only formal excuse and material "evidence" for the arrest and the charges against the Communist deputies was the letter which the "Workers' and Peasants' Group" had addressed to the President of the Chamber of Deputies on October 1, 1939. Here is the full text of this document:

"*Monsieur le Président,*

"Overtures of peace have been made to France.

"At the mere thought that peace may be possible, an immense hope fills the people of our country, who are tormented by the prospect of a long and cruel war, a war that will bury the treasures of human culture beneath mountains of ruins and cost the lives of millions of men, women and children.

"Scarcely had mention of these overtures, which were due to the diplomatic initiative of the U.S.S.R., been made than a controlled press replied in one voice: 'No!'

"Is it possible that journalists who have no mandate from the nation can coldly decide in favor of a war to the finish?

"Is it possible that the peace overtures may be rejected before they are even made known and before the sovereign representation has been consulted?

"We, for our part, do not think so, and we demand of you,

as the President of the Chamber, to approach the public authorities and demand:

"1. That parliament be assembled to discuss the question of peace in public session.

"2. That the members of parliament in the army be allowed to take part in the deliberation of this cardinal question, on which the lives of millions of Frenchmen depend.

"Every Frenchman wants peace, for he feels that a long war will be calamitous to our country and will jeopardize both its future and its democratic liberties.

"The possibility of peace overtures being rejected *a priori* and our thus being led into a hazardous and disastrous adventure must be absolutely precluded.

"We desire with all our might a just and durable peace, and we think it can be secured very quickly, for, as against the imperialist warmongers and Hitler Germany, which is a prey to internal contradictions, there is the might of the Soviet Union, which would permit the realization of a policy of collective security, insure peace and save the independence of the country.

"That is why we think we are serving the best interests of our country in demanding that the overtures of peace made to France be examined with the object of securing as early as possible a just, loyal and durable peace, which our fellow-citizens long for from the bottom of their hearts."

This letter provided the only formal "grounds" for the arrest of the Communist deputies and their committal for court martial.

It is perfectly clear that the Communist deputies were not only entitled but were obliged as elected representatives of the people to demand a session of parliament to discuss any question, let alone the question of peace. But instead of summoning the Chamber, the Government had the Communist deputies arrested.

They were thrown into prison and committed for court martial in spite of the fact that Article 13 of the French Constitution of July 16, 1875, declares that "no member of either Chamber can be indicted or prosecuted for his opinions or his vote."

The bourgeoisie wiped their feet on their own constitution, their own laws.

The arrested Communists were examined by the provost court investigator.

The preliminary "investigation" lasted six months!

BONTE ACCUSES THE ACCUSERS!

Florimond Bonte, whose signature appeared first on the letter to the President of the Chamber, managed to evade the first arrests and continued to work illegally. The bourgeois press seized on this fact and opened a campaign of slander insinuating that Bonte, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, had decamped and left his arrested comrades in the lurch. On November 30, 1939, Bonte suddenly appeared in the Chamber of Deputies and occupied one of the 72 empty places where the Communist group had sat. His appearance threw the Chamber into an indescribable turmoil. The other deputies, led by the "Socialists," hurled themselves on him and handed him over to the police. They would not hear a word of the declaration of the Communist Party which he attempted to read and which was published later in the illegal Communist press.

Twelve days later the court investigator put the following question to him: "Explain why you signed the letter to the President of the Chamber and why you made your comrades sign it."

To this Bonte replied:

"I was elected by the workers of Paris, I am a Communist and I answer only to my Party and the people. Give me the opportunity to take the floor in the Chamber and speak there. To you, an officer of reaction, I have nothing to say."

The assault on Florimond Bonte in the reactionary "Socialist" Chamber of Deputies was not an isolated case. On January 9, 1940, when the Chamber met again, four Communist deputies appeared in the vacant benches of the Communist group—four soldiers in civilian clothes. They wore civilian clothes because persons in military uniform are not permitted to enter the Chamber. The names of these four deputies who had been conscripted into the army were Guyot, Michels, Grenier and Mercier.*

* Michels, deputy for Paris (15th arrondissement), shoemaker, and Secretary of the Leather Workers' Federation; member of the Communist Party for fourteen years. Raymond Guyot, deputy for Villejuif, president of the Young Communist Federation of France and General Secretary of the Young Communist International, member of the Central Committee of the Party. Mercier, deputy for Paris (3rd arrondissement), Secretary of the Waiters' Union. Fernand Grenier, deputy for Saint-Denis, an old Party militant, General Secretary of the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union.—Ed.

The President of the Chamber delivered a bombastic speech in honor of the army of French imperialism. While the Chamber stood in acclamation, the four conscripted Communist deputies demonstratively remained seated. Then, again under the leadership of the "Socialists," the five hundred reactionary deputies hurled themselves on the four Communists with blows and abuse. The courageous conduct of the four soldiers, Communist members of the Chamber, their demonstration against the imperialist war, infuriated the reactionary camp, but awakened enthusiastic responses among the people of France.

Entangled in their own illegalities and malpractices the Government, in conjunction with the reactionary "Socialist" Chamber of Deputies, decided, several months after the arrest of the Communist deputies, to take up the question of depriving (!) them of their seats.

A SOLDIER DEPUTY SILENCES THE PACK!

On January 10, 1940, the Chamber discussed an emergency decree annulling the mandates of the Communist deputies. Etienne Fajon and Adrien Mouton, two other Communist deputies* who had been conscripted into the army, appeared at the session.

Etienne Fajon managed to take the floor and expose the bill in spite of howls of protest and threats and present the case of the Communist Party. We give excerpts from this brilliant speech:

"There is a proposal before the House to annul the mandates of the Communist deputies who, in spite of persecution, do not wish to renounce their past, their opinions and their unlawfully suppressed party. But nearly all the deputies against whom this measure is directed were excluded from this assembly long ago. At the beginning of October they were arrested by order of the Government and clapped into prison where they are being held without trial like common criminals.

"From this platform I send fraternal greetings to the deputies and my friends who have been imprisoned. I send them

* Etienne Fajon, deputy for Courbevoie (Seine), a young schoolmaster, and Adrien Mouton, deputy for Arles (Bouches-du-Rhone), a miner, a metal worker, and later a railwayman; one of the founders of the Young Communist League of France.

my greetings at a moment when a handful of cowards and rascals are renouncing their party in fear of persecution. *We, however, remain steadfast and true to our ideals.*

"I think it important to remind you that we were elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Whether you like it or not we are emissaries of the people. And the people themselves alone have the right to decide the question of the validity or invalidity of our mandates, for we are responsible only to the people.

"You want to set yourselves up in place of the people, you want to deprive a section of the French people of their elected representatives. Your government made haste to abolish what pitiful vestiges of democracy remained without even waiting for this day. Now the true value of bourgeois democracy becomes clear to everyone. . . .

"The meaning of the measures being taken against us is clear to the vast majority of the workers of our country. Your repressions only disclose the true character of the present war which you are misrepresenting as a war for freedom at the very moment when you are destroying freedom inside the country. The workers understand the connection between your depriving us of our mandates and your policy of abolishing social legislation, cutting wages, ruining the peasants and small shopkeepers, a policy that is daily increasing the cost of living.

"This policy which hits the working masses is being carried out with the support of all the parties in the Chamber, including the Socialist Party. [*Voice from the Socialist benches: "We were expecting that accusation!"*]

"Yes, history repeats itself. Occasionally there have been 'quiet' times when you preached class struggle, but in times of stress, when war begins—as was the case in 1914—you go down on your knees to the capitalists of your country and try to persuade the workers to take unresisting the blows which rain down upon them. (*Uproar.*)

"I despise your insults!

"You suppress labor organizations and persecute their best defenders because you know that the people do not approve of this policy.

"You, Messieurs, members of the Government, can persecute us today, you can put some of us behind bars, you can eject us from the Chamber. *But you will not shatter the de-*



THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES BEFORE

The trial of the forty-four Communist Deputies opened in Paris on March 20, 1940, and ended on April 3, 1940. This court-martial of elected spokesmen of the French people, representatives of the largest political party in France, was held behind closed doors—the first time in over a century that political defendants were denied a public trial. In the prisoners' dock they were deprived of even such necessities as paper and pencils with which to take notes in preparation of their defense. Total sentences of 207 years were meted out to the Communist Deputies, with forfeiture of civil and political rights, and heavy fines.



THE THIRD MILITARY TRIBUNAL IN PARIS

A wave of protest swept through the world. In England, the United States, Mexico and other countries, mass demonstrations, workers' delegations, committees from people's organizations and progressive leaders of the people voiced the protest of millions at these reactionary attacks against the Communist Deputies in France. Their heroic conduct during the trial centered world-wide attention on the real betrayers of the French nation.

The names of the defendants are indicated in the above photograph. The first lawyer on the left is Marcel Willard.

termination of the French people to have peace, you will not shatter their determination to maintain their social gains, to retain the fruits of the battles they have fought; you will not shatter their determination steadily to follow the path of social, economic and political progress.

“The will of the people will triumph yet in spite of your decrees, in spite of your depriving us of our mandates, in spite of your persecutions! And their will will prove stronger than you, one fine day!

“As for us, I repeat on my own behalf and on behalf of my friend and colleague Mouton, likewise on behalf of the majority of my friends and comrades incarcerated in La Santé that *we will be true to the cause of the proletariat and proletarian internationalism, the cause of socialism. We shall defend the true interests of the French people and together with the peoples of the Soviet Union we will fight as before for the real interests of the working people, for the cause of communism. . . .*”

The whole bourgeois press, particularly the “Socialist” newspapers, raised a furious outcry against Etienne Fajon for his speech but did not quote a word of it, lest they should expose themselves and let out the truth.

The text of the speech was printed in the *Journal Officiel*. But the illegal Communist sheets immediately broadcast it throughout the country in thousands of copies.

THE REAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE UNSEATED

A few days later the Chamber of Deputies deprived the Communist deputies of their mandates.

The official speaker on this question was the “Socialist” deputy Barthélémy. This creature’s claims to respectability can be judged from the following fact: In 1920-21, when he was an active member of the royalist organization *Action Française*, he founded a “people’s bank” in Béziers. Hundreds of small vintners deposited their savings there. He appropriated these funds and vanished without a trace. And now this deputy of the “Socialist” Party, this police agent and professional fraud, urged the use of the guillotine against active members of the Communist Party. This creature, writing in the columns of *Matin*, demanded

that all the leading members of the Communist Party should be put against the wall and shot.

At this session of the Chamber of Deputies another "Socialist" renegade, Chasseigne, demanded the most rigorous reprisals against the Communists. Chasseigne, who wormed his way into the Communist Party many years ago, was expelled for embezzling Y.C.L. funds. This "Socialist" Chasseigne won an ovation from the extreme reactionaries in the Chamber with his criminal statement that "the only proceeding for the Communist deputies is a bullet in the back of the neck."

The next speaker after this "Socialist" thug was Louis Oscar Frossard who came forward naturally (!) as an "accuser" of the Communist deputies and the Communist Party. Louis Oscar Frossard is notorious for his political renegacy. At one time he was a member of the Communist Party which he left at the end of 1922 just before the French occupation of the Ruhr. After spending some time in the "Left" wing of the Socialist Party he moved over to the Right wing, then left the Socialist Party only to appear shortly after in the Chamber as the nominee of the slave-owning sugar and rum magnates of the Island of Martinique. This political adventurer too demanded ruthless measures against the Communists.

Such were the "denouncers" of the Communists, such the "worthy company" which sat in the democratic French parliament.

The will of the people meant nothing to these "democrats." They not only deprived the Communists of their mandates, they not only set up "administrators" in place of the Communist municipalities, these "democrats" also intended to appoint "deputies" at their own discretion to replace the elected representatives of the people.

The verdict against the Communist deputies was decided long before the trial. This was apparent from Bonnet's statement of July 1, 1939, which was printed in the official *Yellow Book*. Bonnet said that the "muzzling of the Communists," the suppression of the Communist Party and the arrest of the Communist deputies were long foreseen measures, considered necessary for the conduct of war.

III. THE PROCEEDINGS PUT THE BOURGEOISIE THEMSELVES ON TRIAL

When the trial of the Communist deputies opened on March 20, 1940, the provost court had to all intents and purposes nothing to do but formally register the accomplished facts and pronounce the sentence which the Government had prepared long before.

One of the defendants, Dr. Georges Lévy, an old Communist and deputy from Lyons, ridiculed the functions of the court.

"Gentlemen of the court," he said, "you have been put in a tragic dilemma. The Government and the Chamber of Deputies have already pronounced sentence upon us. You must either repudiate them or sentence us; you are not at liberty to decide."

The bourgeoisie were very nervous about the trial. They prepared it by stealth, like thieves in the night. This trial of elected spokesmen of the French people, representatives of the largest political party in France, was held behind closed doors. The Communist deputies were tried by a military tribunal.

The only document in the case, the only "evidence" against the Communists in the dock, the letter of the "Workers and Peasants' Group" to the President of the Chamber of Deputies was forgotten (!) by the investigator and the Government prosecutor. It was filed only 24 hours after the beginning of the hearing, and even then the Government prosecutor tampered with it. At first he tried to brazen it out, putting the blame on the typist but finally he was cornered into admitting that he himself had "edited" and "amended" the document, in other words, he had falsified it.

Thus the trial began. The defendants demanded paper and pencils and the *Journal Officiel* to prepare their defense. The court ruled: "In the name of the French people, etc." . . . (such is the formula) the elected representatives of the French people were not permitted to receive pencils, paper or the official parliamentary journal.

The defendants demanded that Daladier, Bonnet and other

political personages be summoned to give evidence, with the demand that the Court subpoena Daladier on the grounds that:

“Monsieur Eduard Daladier as the chairman of the Radical and Radical-Socialist Party, from 1935, collaborated with the Communists in the People's Front and prior to September 1939 did not consider that the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Third International (whose statutes and theses of 1928 he could not help knowing) was an impediment to collaboration with the Communists in public life, in the parliamentary majority and even in the French Government which they were invited to join with Daladier.”

This request was declined. The court gave as their grounds a law passed in 1812. This moved one of the defendants to exclaim: “Where are we, under the republic or under the empire!”

For over a century no political trials in France had been held *in camera*. During the Convention, under the regime of the revolutionary dictatorship, there were numerous trials but they were all held publicly. The trials of King Louis XVI, Danton and others of the time were held publicly.

Under the Directory, Francois Emile Babeuf and his comrades were tried for their Communist ideas. The trial, which lasted almost four months, was public and the verbatim report of the 92 sittings of the court was published in full. The trials of Louis August Blanqui, who was many times arraigned for his revolutionary activities, were always held publicly. The trial of the Paris Communards after the fall of the Commune was also held publicly.

Under the Third Republic all political trials were held in open court: the trials of Lafargue, Jude, Deville, Louise Michel, the trade union trials, etc. The only exception was the trial of Captain Dreyfus in 1894, an officer of the General Staff, falsely accused of supplying a German agent with secret documents.

During the first imperialist World War the “Bonnet Rouge,” Caillaux, Malvy, Bolo and all other cases were tried publicly although the defendants were accused of having connections with enemy agents.

The Communist deputies were court-martialled behind closed

doors because the Government was afraid of the truth, whose fearless spokesmen were the Communist deputies. What the bourgeoisie and their "Socialist" camp-followers perpetrated was not a trial but an act of class violence against the Party which expressed the true interests of the people. This was boldly asserted by the defendants and their defense at the beginning of the trial:

"The hearing of the case *in camera* as you insist cannot be justified either by law, jurisprudence or by history. You insist on closed doors because you dread the response which our words might evoke, you are haunted by the fear that the prisoner's dock will become a tribune of accusation.

"You are afraid to give a public trial to the arraigned deputies, who represent between four and five million French citizens, who have already been held in prison for six months. Even under the monarchy, even during the empire, political trials were always held publicly. If nevertheless you rule to hear the case behind closed doors, tomorrow morning, one hundred fifty years after the storming of the Bastille, people who read the newspapers will ask themselves whether France is a democratic republic or an absolute monarchy.

"Closed doors are proof of the fear which this trial inspires in its initiators, its stagers, the regime which they have created. Dread of the truth, dread that the truth will reach the people, fear that the accused in the eyes of the public would become the accusers, that is what closed doors signify. But can closed doors keep the truth from spreading abroad? No! Whatever you do the truth will be known in France and beyond her borders."

One of the Communist deputies quoted the famous words which Babeuf uttered one hundred and fifty years ago.

"Other people, not our judges, will hear us. And the people too are interested in everything we say; we speak as though the people were present here. We will be acquitted in their eyes."

Another Communist deputy, recalling the heroism of Blanqui, the revolutionary who spent half a century in the dungeons of the monarchy and the republic, quoted his words:

"I stand before you, gentlemen of the court, but it is not only to you I speak; I speak to France, the only supreme court which I recognize and whose sentence cannot be revoked."

Francois Billoux, textile worker, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, gave the following reply to the President of the court who had interjected the remark that he was no longer a deputy:

"I am a Deputy from Marseilles, my electors have not deprived me of my mandate and here you can do nothing. We are Communists, Marxists, Leninists, Stalinists, and you can take any repressive measures against us you wish, but you will not destroy our consciousness, our conviction, our assurance that tomorrow the communist system of organization will triumph throughout the world. You will gain nothing by gagging the Communists. The capitalist system is marching to its doom. We are accused (as it is phrased in the indictment) of preaching communism as the only salvation of peace in Europe. We thank the state prosecutor for these words. When he wrote them he dealt a terrible blow to those who claim that the Communists have been wanting war. Perhaps it is desired to conduct the trial behind closed doors for fear that the country should get to know that communism is the only salvation of peace in Europe. If that is so I am not afraid of closed doors, because the whole country has already realized it."

Florimond Bonte, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as though echoing the words of Karl Liebknecht, boldly challenged the military tribunal:

"I propose that the court should hold the trial in one of the biggest public halls in Paris and invite delegates from the factories, the fleet, the army and the air force so that everybody should be properly informed of the proceedings. Then I propose, let the state prosecutor who has the power to call any witness he likes invite all the members of the cabinet, all the deputies who, without giving us a hearing, voted for the annulment of our mandates; let him stand on one side and let one of us, it doesn't matter who, we leave the choice to you, stand on the other side. I would calmly await the verdict of the people. . . ."

"What, practically speaking, is the use of parliament? It is nothing more than a fiction! It is nothing more than a screen for a secret dictatorship which, in order to deceive the people, periodically convenes parliament which is merely a talking shop whose function is to assume the responsibility which the dictators, the despots, do not care to take upon themselves openly."

Virgile Barel, Communist deputy for Nice, a member of the Communist Party Central Control Commission, exposed the real betrayers of the French people:

"We are told that we are traitors. We represent the French people here. The people are never traitors. It is the propertied classes that have always betrayed the people when their class privileges were in danger.

"The capitalist world is divided into classes which are waging a life and death struggle. This is a fact. In this struggle the Soviet Union is on the side of the working people. Our actions are inspired by the spirit of the Third International. Long live the Third International!

"Our strength lies in the fact that we express the cherished ideals of the laboring masses. I am full of admiration for the mighty achievements of the socialist revolution in Russia.

"For the future, too, I shall remain solid with the Communist Party of France. If you convict us the people of France will release us. The present masters of France have precipitated her into a fearful adventure. But the war is not popular. Not for long will the people resign themselves to a regime of oppression, violence, jails, restrictions and concentration camps. You may rest assured that the masses of France will recover the freedom of which they have been deprived."

Jean Bartolini, at one time a worker at the Toulon arsenal, Deputy for Varve and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, declared:

"We belong to our class which can neither be bought nor sold. We are the standard bearers of the workers and peasants and if they love us it is because we have consecrated our lives utterly to the struggle for the betterment of their conditions. They know that the active members of the Communist Party who are sitting here, secretaries of trade unions,

federations and workingmen's delegates, have been fighting in the cause of the working people. And you wanted us to renounce our past. How little you know us! We are workingmen who know the meaning of poverty and hard times. We had our choice: either to be given a position with a salary of 107,000 francs a year and renounce our Party, or to be put in prison and retain our honor as fighters. We did not hesitate for a moment.

"I have a twelve-year-old son who has written saying: 'Papa, I am proud of you. I go to school. I keep my head up and the teachers often ask me how my papa is getting on.'"

The Communist Deputy Joanny Berlioz, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, made the following statement:

"Yes, we have been maintaining international connections with the Communists of other countries. But there are people who maintain another kind of international connections; they sit on the directorates of large capitalist concerns.

"But the ties between Communists are the ties of an international party which is inspired with a common ideal, a single will to achieve their aim, to realize it throughout the world. In all countries, with the exception of the Soviet Union, there are exploited and oppressed people and in all countries in the world there are Communists who pursue one and the same object, the abolition of the exploitation of man by man."

Speeches in the same spirit were made by Gaston Cornavin, Etienne Fajon and Waldeck Rochet, and a number of other comrades. Thus, on the very first day of the trial, when the question of judicial procedure was still under discussion, the accused became accusers who exposed the bourgeoisie, the Government, the court, the imperialist character of the war, and the social-traitors as lackeys of the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeois press was in a quandary. In spite of themselves they had to admit that the trial was a failure. Even the reactionary *Le Jour* spoke of it:

"The deputies turned the docks into a platform from

which to accuse their accusers with the utmost virulence and to carry on their propaganda with the utmost fire.

"Such was the paradoxical and lamentable spectacle offered the public."

An equally sorrowful admission appeared on March 21, in *Le Populaire*, the propaganda sheet of the prostitute "Socialist" Party:

"It would be quite futile after this long day in court to conceal the truth or be hypocritical. The truth is clear beyond question. One has only to analyze the proceedings to realize that the Communist deputies proved more than a match for the tribunal which had received a decided setback."

Yes, true enough, it was an unheard-of fiasco for the bourgeoisie.

Deputies, senators, the whole bourgeois press clamored in one voice: "Shut the doors fast, gag the Communist deputies, stifle their voices!"

The doors of the court were closed. The only "public" admitted to the court were the gendarme officers who guarded the prisoners.

However, closing the doors did not help. The walls of the provost court proved to have ears in spite of all precautions. The mighty revolutionary truth of the Communist deputies spread throughout France and even beyond the borders of France. The Communist Party, driven deep underground, defying the decree punishing with death persons conducting Communist propaganda, published reports about the trial, as well as the joint declaration of the Communist deputies which they read at the last sitting of the court. The main points in this declaration were:

DECLARATION OF THE COMMUNIST DEPUTIES BEFORE THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL

"In the whole arsenal of the law, which, incidentally, was created to serve the capitalist class, you will not find a single serious argument to justify the arrest of the Communist deputies and their committal for trial.

"There are times in history when the ruling classes can

retain power only by violating their own laws. We know of such instances in the history of our country, and we also see that sooner or later, by revolutionary action, the people put an end to such regimes.

"What is the charge against us?

"The charge against us is that we, in accordance with the regulations of the Chamber, formed a parliamentary group and, exercising our rights as deputies, we wrote a letter to the President of the Chamber requesting him to convene parliament to discuss the question of peace. Upon these grounds we were arrested and committed for trial.

"To address a letter to the President of the Chamber as well as to form a parliamentary group is sanctioned by Article 13 of the Constitution of 1875. Consequently we were acting within our rights and performing our duty as deputies.

"For six months the persecutions to which we were subjected were justified on the grounds that we refused to accept the Government's point of view on the Soviet-German Pact. We were said to be disrupting the unity of the nation. It was impressed upon certain sections of the French public that this was the reason for the persecutions with which we were assailed.

"We protest that this version is a shameless lie. The Government itself has just admitted this fact in its *Yellow Book*. In a document cited in this book, number 149 (Appendix XX), and headed 'Memorandum of Monsieur Georges Bonnet, Minister for Foreign Affairs, of his conversation with Count von Welszeck, the German Ambassador in Paris,' the following phrases occur:

"I informed the ambassador that he could observe in France a unanimous national movement in support of the government. The elections were being postponed, public meetings were prohibited, attempts to spread foreign propaganda from whatever source were being stopped and *we would bring the Communists to reason.*'

"This document is dated July 1, 1939. At that time the Soviet-German Pact was non-existent and the approval or non-approval of the Communists could not enter into it.

"Thus, two months before the signing of the Soviet-German Pact, the French Government, which was then negotiating with Moscow, declared in an official document that its policy was to settle accounts with the Communists.

So let there be no subterfuges, petty tricks and shabby dodges! Let not a mere pretext, and an unsuccessful one at that, be palmed off as the real reason! Let us not be reproached for the standpoint we took at the end of August and in September, 1939.

"Our persecutors on their own admission had already decided to strike a blackguardly blow at us on July 1.

"True, they tried subsequently to invent other pretexts. A foul campaign of slander was launched against us, while we were all deprived of the means to defend ourselves. Is this not proof that the misrulers of our country fear to tell the truth about our trial?

"We told the truth at our examination and shall tell it now. Our aim is to make our trial a trial of those who accuse us.

"We were arrested and committed because we are Communists, because we have remained Communists in spite of all persuasions, in spite of all persecutions.

"We were committed because we were and are still opposed to imperialist war, because we urged the people to demand the immediate cessation of the war, to demand a just and lasting peace, because we indicated to the people of France a way to a free and happy life.

"But neither trial, nor conviction, nor concentration camps can deter the Communists from fighting in this sublime, human cause.

"We shall remain implacably opposed to this war which you refused to avert, a war which might involve the whole of mankind because you have put the protection of capitalist privileges higher than concern for peace and the independence of the peoples.

"The culprit responsible for the war is the capitalist regime, which, as Jaurès said, 'is charged with war as a cloud is charged with tempest.'

"The instigators of the war want to clothe it with all the virtues. They are masking their true belligerent aims because they know that the people will not fight for sordid interests, the interests of a handful of exploiters.

"The present war, like the war of 1914-18, is an imperialist war. The capitalist groups are disputing each others' claims to markets, the sources of raw materials, colonies for the exploitation of other nations.

"We say, and repeat, that the working class and working

people in general have nothing to gain by this war. It can only bring death to millions of their kith and kin, dire poverty and devastation, the destruction of liberties, while the financial and industrial magnates reap enormous profits.

"Who is responsible for this war? We refuse to be accomplices to that immense imposture by which, in each country, the responsibility is thrown exclusively on the enemy governments.

"There are culprits in our own country, too! These, above all, are the Government and its leader, Daladier, who are ruling the state to the detriment of the people, in the interests of a minority, in the interests of the big capitalists.

"From Monsieur Coulondre's dispatch to the Foreign Ministry, cited in the *Yellow Book*, we see that the rejection of the Soviet proposals was bound to lead to the breakdown of the Moscow negotiations and made an agreement impossible, the only thing which could have saved peace.

"Today, from the Far North to the Near East there is being conducted a campaign of slander and provocation, which is to draw the laboring masses into an anti-Soviet adventure.

"But the men responsible for this policy are preparing unpleasant surprises for themselves, for the working people of France will never forget that the spirit of France is the spirit of liberty. They will never be party to such an adventure. As in 1919 they will rise up against the criminal governments which have betrayed France's great mission.

"We were prosecuted because we—and we alone—had the courage to call for the ejection of Daladier's government, that government which bears the gravest responsibility for the war and which is establishing in our country a regime of the blackest reaction.

"How dare people speak of a war for freedom who destroy freedom in their own country?

"Daladier's government is guilty of treachery to the elected spokesmen of the people, the Communists, who represent one and a half million electors, now deprived of the right to have deputies in the Chamber.

"It prohibited *l'Humanité*, one of the largest newspapers in France.

"It suppressed the Communist Party, the largest political party in France, and confiscated its property. It acts similarly

with the organizations of the workers and peasants, educational and cultural societies, the associations of artisans, professionals and ex-servicemen.

"It is destroying everything that the working people of France have been building up by years of persevering effort: the trade unions, cooperative societies, sports organizations, mother and child welfare societies, and other organizations.

"It is reviving the times of the *lettre de cache* by imprisoning, as M. Daladier himself admitted in the Senate, thousands of French citizens and by organizing concentration camps in France.

"It is abolishing social legislation in the factories. It is annulling the rights of the workers' representatives. It is deposing, persecuting, committing and convicting representatives of the people, members of parliament, the municipalities, county councils, arbitration boards, etc.

"Such a Government does not stand for the interests of the people. We consider that the welfare of France imperatively demands the formation of a workers' and peasants' government which will really represent the interests of the nation.

"The capitalists calculate that they can still hoodwink the people for a long time to come because they are supported by the 'Socialist' Party, its leaders, the Blums, Paul Faures and Zyromskis and the treacherous leaders of the General Confederation of Labor. These people are all taking a leading part in conducting chauvinistic propaganda and persecuting the workers. They sabotaged the program of the People's Front and now they are up to the ears in the 'holy alliance,' breaking up the proletarian organizations. It is they first and foremost who are to blame for the misfortunes which have overtaken the working people of France. They have shown themselves in their true colors as enemies of the people.

"The Second International is now in a state of complete putrefaction, a repetition touching even greater depths than its collapse in 1914 at the beginning of the first imperialist World War.

"We are internationalists. We are the only internationalists. The working people of all races and color are our brothers. Our fate is tied up with that of the British miners and seamen, the workers of Essen and the longshoremen of Hamburg, the workingmen of Prague, the Polish peasants,

the Arabian fellahin and the Chinese coolies, just as it is bound up with the fate of the free workers and collective farmers of the Soviet Union.

"Messieurs the 'Socialist' leaders, these grovelling lackeys of the capitalists, think they can insult us by calling us 'Stalinites'!

"What does this mean? We have always maintained, and we repeat, that the salvation of the French people from all their ills cannot come from without. Their emancipation will be the work of their own hands. They will be inspired by the glorious traditions of our people. But it is true that for us and for millions of men and women in all the five continents Stalin is the brilliant successor of the immortal cause of Marx, Engels and Lenin and the mighty builder of classless socialist society.

"Marx who studied capitalism when it was in the prime of its development showed us that communism would come to take its place. In 1848 Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* 'A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism!'

"Thanks to Lenin and Stalin, communism is no longer a specter: it has become a reality on one-sixth of the globe and tomorrow will be a reality throughout the world.

"Lenin and the glorious Bolshevik Party which he wrought showed us during the war of 1914-18 how we can put an end to imperialist war and achieve the emancipation of the workers, peasants and intellectuals and the colonial peoples.

"Stalin has shown us how a country devastated by imperialist war and capitalist anarchy has, in the space of twenty-two years, become a mighty socialist state marching forward to communism.

"The French imperialists are mortal enemies of the U.S.S.R. And this is easy to understand. Their hatred toward the U.S.S.R. is the hatred of a class which feels that it is doomed. The U.S.S.R. is an example to the French people of what a people can become, what they can achieve when they have rid themselves of parasites.

"We love France and her people. We are proud of her scientists, her thinkers, her writers, her artists who win France the admiration of the peoples of the whole world. We are proud of the grand revolutionary past of the French people who have risen more than once against their tyrants.

"Yes! We love the people of France and want to rid them

of those who are leading them to slaughter and ruination, from those who are subjecting them to terror and violence.

"The masses turn with profound loathing from the handful of cowards who have betrayed them (Gitton, Capron & Co.). These renegades represent nobody but themselves and their own infamy.

"We, Communists, call upon the people to fight for bread, for peace and freedom.

"Yes! We are Communists! We are proud to be the heirs of the Communards who by their self-abnegation saved the republic and fought for the emancipation of the working people, and of whom Marx said that they were storming the heavens.

"Communism means peace, the development of human individuality and human dignity, the advancement of science and the arts, the florescence of civilization.

"We are Frenchmen and we long with heart and soul to see France free, strong and happy.

"We are internationalists, therefore we consider every victory gained by the proletariat in any country a victory for ourselves.

"We French Communists are fighting for the emancipation of our country! We want to preserve it from war!

"We urge the people to enforce their will and secure peace!

"We believe in our country, the France of 1793, 1830, 1848, the French of the Paris Commune, the France of February, 1934, and May, 1936.

"We have confidence in the people of France, and we are convinced that they will soon consign to the grave the regime that breeds poverty and war.

"We greet the host of working people who are fighting valiantly for communism.

"Under the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, following the example of Karl Liebknecht and Georgi Dimitroff, under the leadership of the beloved leaders of the French people, Cachin, Thorez, Marty, Duclos—forward to communism!"

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRIAL OF THE COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

The trial of forty-four French Communist deputies came to an end on April 3. Nine deputies were convicted and sentenced in default, the rest of them were in prison or in the army when the trial began. There was only a handful of renegades, cowards who had degenerated long before, who deserted to the camp of the reactionary bourgeoisie.

Thirty-six deputies were sentenced to five years' imprisonment, forfeiture of civil and political rights for five years with fines ranging from four to five thousand francs. Four of the defendants, in view of their disablement in the first World War, and one who was sick when the trial began, were "let off" with four years' suspended sentence, forfeiture of civil rights for five years and a fine of 4,000 francs. Of the forty-four deputies arraigned only three ignominiously capitulated and refused to subscribe to the joint declaration of the Communist deputies. They were given a suspended sentence.

The trial of the French Communist deputies was an event of great international import. A wave of protest swept the world. A number of labor organizations in England demonstrated outside the French Embassy in London, protesting against the outrage. The Embassy was bombarded with resolutions of protest from labor organizations and other public bodies in all parts of the country.

At a mass meeting of workers in Manchester a delegation was elected to hand the French Consul a letter of protest against the sentence of the military tribunal. A mass protest meeting was also held in Newcastle.

Similar resolutions condemning the persecution of the Communists in France and the sentences of the Communist deputies were adopted by the Cardiff branch of the Labor Party, the Derby and district committee of the Amalgamated Engineers Union, by branches of the Left Book Club in Smethwick (Staffordshire) and in Coventry (Warwickshire), by the Electricians Union branch in Hayes (Middlesex) and by other organizations.

William Gallacher declared in Parliament:

"Today the butchers of the Paris Commune have appeared on the scene again. They are using their authority as in the year 1871 against the workers of Paris, against the flower of the French working class."

The Dutch proletarians sent the French representative at The Hague a protest against the trial of the Communist emissaries of the French people. Postcards with slogans of protest against the trial were circulated among the workers.

A vivid illustration of the attitude of workers abroad to the trial was the letter of Dutch unemployed workers addressed to Florimond Bonte.

"Comrade Florimond Bonte!

"We, unemployed workers of Amsterdam, greet you and your comrades who are putting up a heroic struggle before the military court against the French reactionaries and their imperialist war. You can rest assured that the unemployed, who are ready for struggle, wholeheartedly support the working class of France and the French Communist Party. We promise you and your comrades that we shall support your struggle for freedom with all our strength.

"Long live the struggle of the international proletariat against imperialist war!"

The American *Daily Worker*, protesting against the sentence, stigmatized it as a crime, and paid tribute to the Communist deputies for their firm and brave stand in the name of the French people. It urged the American trade unions and other progressive organizations to protest against the action of the French authorities, to demand the release of the Communist deputies and the restoration of constitutional rights to the French people.

The *Daily Worker* correspondent in Mexico reported that a resolution of protest against the sentence had been adopted at a meeting of six hundred branch leaders of the Mexican Communist Party. The Mexican Confederation of Labor, and the newspaper *El Popular* also protested against the sentence which the French reactionaries had imposed on the deputies of the French people.

The Communists of Sweden sent their greetings to the Com-

munist Party of France. A district conference of the Swedish Communist Party held in Medelpad wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the French Communist Party:

“Comrades!

“The district organization of the Communist Party of Sweden in Medelpad sends its fraternal greetings to the Communist Party of France. We join our voice to the thousands and tens of thousands of protests which are pouring in from all parts of the world against the actions of the French reactionaries, who are abolishing the democratic liberties and rights of the French people.

“We protest against the inhuman persecution of the Communist Party of France, the annulment of the Communist mandate in the chamber and municipal bodies; we protest against the arrest of Communist representatives.

“We protest against the inhuman treatment of Spanish, Czech, Austrian and other refugees.

“We greet the Communist Party of France as an indomitable, valiant fighter against predatory imperialist war, against the reactionaries’ barbarous treatment of prisoners, championing the interests of the French working people, the soldiers and their families. We salute the thousands of brave fighters who are waging this struggle in France.

“Long live the Communist Party of France!”

The trial and sentencing of the Communist deputies show that the French bourgeoisie, having embarked on their destructive, depredatory and reactionary war, first of all turned their guns on the French people, plundered them, tightened the screw of exploitation, deprived them of all their rights and liberties, condemned them to hunger and destitution, sentencing their best representatives to imprisonment, forced labor and concentration camp.

The trial and the sentence show that to preserve their class supremacy, their capital and profits, the French bourgeoisie and their “Socialist” lackeys have been betraying the French people and the independence of France all along the line. The trial and the sentence revealed the bankruptcy of the French bourgeoisie, showed that they cannot cope with the social and economic consequences of the war, that they are impotent to control the

events they have set into motion, that they are impotent to hold in check the growing indignation of the proletariat and the masses of the people. The trial showed that the bourgeoisie, in their fear of communism and powerless to halt the growing influence of communism, led France to military defeat and the loss of her national independence.

The trial tore off the last pitiful shreds of bourgeois democracy, denuding the falseness of it, exposing to the masses in all its foul nakedness the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, exposing the bankruptcy of bourgeois order, bourgeois legality, bourgeois law. By its attitude to the Communist deputies the parliament of bourgeois France exposed its democracy as a sham, glaringly exposed its reactionary nature as a class weapon of the bourgeois dictatorship; it dealt a mortal blow to traditional beliefs in bourgeois parliamentarism. This pitiful travesty of a trial exposed and made ridiculous to the people the true reactionary class nature of bourgeois justice, showing that the imperialist bourgeoisie and their "Socialist" servants, wreaking class vengeance on the real representatives of the people, are resorting and will resort more and more to any violation of their own laws, to any crime and infamy.

The trial laid bare class contradictions which had been deeply concealed, it showed the masses the true character of all parties, groupings and their leaders, the true character of the whole reactionary "holy alliance." It exposed again and again those who had betrayed the cause of peace, who had betrayed the People's Front, the interests and liberties of the French people and the independence of France. It showed who were and still are the true defenders of the people's interests and liberties, of peace, the champions of real independence for France.

The bourgeoisie had been hoping to still the voice of the Communists, to defame and discredit the Communist Party, demoralize it, isolate it from the masses, wipe it out completely, and in this way intimidate the workers, draw the fangs of their discontent, disunite them, and take all the fighting spirit out of them. But their calculations were defeated. As a result of the trial the workers understood much better the true nature of the reactionary war and the baton-and-bayonet regime of the reactionaries, they understood much better the true nature of

the policy and activity of the "Socialist" Party, they obtained a better understanding of their own class aims, the function and tasks of the Communist Party.

The trial disclosed completely to the whole world the disgusting, perfidious, arch-reactionary role of the leaders of the "Socialist" Party. They had been the first to demand the suppression of the Communist Party, the arrest and committal of the Communist deputies.

Last September Leon Blum insisted that the leaders of the Communist Party should be handed over to the executioner. The *Pays Socialiste*, the propaganda sheet of the "Socialist" Faure, conducted a campaign demanding the death penalty for active Communists. Another "Socialist," Sérol, Minister of Justice, was the author of the "death decree" under which "all persons are liable to death sentence who draft, circulate or simply have Communist newspapers or leaflets in their keeping." He, Sérol, was authorized to supervise the enforcement of the "death decree."

These bribe-taking leaders of the "Socialist" Party are the most rabid propagandists and agitators for the spread of the imperialist war, for the organization of crusades against the U.S.S.R. They, the "Socialists," are in the first ranks of the reactionary gang who have attacked the Communists. They have ranged themselves factually, formally and openly "on the side of Versailles against the Communards." (*Lenin.*) The present activities of the leaders of the French "Socialist" Party only confirm once more the justice of Comrade Stalin's words:

"Present day Social-Democratism is an *ideological prop* of capitalism. Lenin was a thousand times right when he said that the present Social-Democratic politicians are 'real agents of the bourgeoisie in the labor movement, the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,' that in the 'civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie' they would inevitably range themselves 'on the side of Versailles against the Communards.' *It is impossible to put an end to capitalism without putting an end to Social-Democratism in the labor movement.*"*

* J. V. Stalin, *The October Revolution*, p. 164, International Publishers, New York.

The trial showed the working class and the masses of the people that the success of the struggle against capitalism, reaction, hunger and war, for peace, bread and freedom depends directly on waging a ruthless struggle against the Social-Democratic agents of the bourgeoisie in the labor movement.

The trial showed that the Communist Party of France is organically and inseverably linked with the working class and the people of France, that this Party alone consistently and bravely defends their interests, their rights and liberties, that this Party alone points to the true escape from the war, that it is the only true champion and defender of the interests and the independence of the nation, that communism is an invincible force which is not to be shaken by any persecution, repression or terrorism. The conduct of the Communist deputies on trial and hundreds of trials involving leading and rank-and-file members of the Communist Party give thousands of examples of the allegiance to principle, the revolutionary staunchness of the Communist Party, and the impregnable unity of its ranks.

The attempts of the bourgeoisie to demoralize the Communist Party from within have failed. Of 30,000 leading Party members the bourgeoisie have only been able to recruit some three dozen renegades—cowards and degenerates as well as exposed *agents provocateurs*. The plans of the bourgeoisie to organize a bourgeois police-controlled party under the leadership of Gitton, Bassar and other renegades have come to nothing. The workers, Party members and sympathizers, far from following these renegades, have on the contrary dealt summarily with them. The renegades are hiding in their corners, too scared to show their faces to the workers.

The trial of the Communist deputies showed the enormous importance of the Leninist, Stalinist proletarian party, the party of a new type, free from bourgeois parliamentary cretinism and able under the severest conditions of White terror to conduct an independent, sound revolutionary class proletarian policy. Such a party is the Communist Party of France. It has become such a party thanks to a relentless internal struggle against opportunists and sectarians and by drastically purging the Party and the labor movement of Trotskyite police agents.

The Communist Party could not have stood its present test

had it not been united ideologically, politically and organizationally. Fortified with the ideological, political and organizational principles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin it has been able to withstand all storm and attacks, to take the necessary tactical turns in good time, issue new slogans at the right moment and steadily pursue its own policy.

The trial of the Communist deputies will help to expose further the bankruptcy and treachery of the bourgeoisie, it will help to strengthen the influence of the Communist Party among the masses, to unite the masses around the proletariat, to sever the masses politically from the bourgeoisie.

The whole trend of the trial, the courageous and internationalist conduct of the French Communist deputies, also has enormous international significance. The trial showed that war and reaction are being opposed not by individual Liebknichts whose voices reach small groups of the proletariat, slowly and with great difficulty. Now there are hundreds, thousands of Liebknichts with or without deputies' mandates upholding their cause before the military tribunals, the courts of the rabid bourgeois reaction. Now Liebknichts and Dimitroffs have become a mass phenomena, bearing witness to the exemplary class maturity of the proletariat and its political foresight.

The French Communist deputies spoke not only on their own behalf and expressed not only their own thoughts, feelings and convictions, they spoke for the French and the international proletariat, they expressed the thoughts, feelings, aspirations and will of the French and international proletariat. Their voice was not only the voice of heroes but an ominous echo of the storm which is gathering among the multitudes. That is why the speeches of the French Communist deputies before the provost court awakened a warm response among the working people of all the capitalist countries, belligerent and non-belligerent, among millions of soldiers under arms. The workers of *all* countries, the soldiers on *all* fronts are speaking and will speak more and more of the French Communist deputies as *their comrades*, their heroes, their representatives. In this way the gallant stand of the French Communist deputies gave an impetus to the further consolidation of the ranks of the international working class, to the organization of a people's front for peace, a front

of struggle against predatory war, reaction and capitalism.

The trial of the Communist deputies and the sentence of the provost court represent only a vivid episode, merely a detached, initial political skirmish, merely a prologue to the great historic class battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, who let loose the dogs of imperialist war, led France to defeat and surrender the French people to a foreign yoke.

But the French people, who have written so many glorious pages in the history of mankind, will not perish. "Only the people are immortal"; this great truth uttered by Stalin, the great leader of peoples, applies also to the French people. They will rise again from the catastrophe which has overtaken them. They have seen from bitter experience who are their enemies, open and secret, they have realized who are their true friends and staunch defenders. They will never again let themselves be deceived by the babbling hypocrisy of cowardly politicians who call themselves Radicals or Socialists and cater to the social requirements of the bourgeoisie. Neither will they allow the bloody experiments of the new-fangled reaction to be performed on the lacerated body of France under the guise of "revivals," "renovations" or "resurrections." The French people most obviously are beginning to understand that the only way to their true revival and emancipation is the way which was pointed to them at the trial of the Communist deputies: a united people, a united nation around the working class. The working class is the organizer, the unifying force, the defender, the leader of the people. A united working class consistently pursuing its own policy independently of the bourgeoisie, pursuing under all conditions a struggle against all forms of exploitation and oppression, pursuing under all conditions a fight in the defense of the interests and the liberties of the people for fraternal cooperation between the peoples of all countries—this is the only surety for the real renascence and emancipation of the French people.

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